DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 911 HE 025 674

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TITLE Developing International Student Internships.
PUB DATE 26 Mar 92
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions (11th, Ypsilanti, MI, March 25-28, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Administration Education; Colleges; *Cooperative Programs; *Educational Cooperation; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; Negative Attitudes; *Professional Education; School Business Relationship; Universities

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that graduating business students from institutions of higher education must be better equipped to deal with a changing world and be provided with the skills necessary to compete in a world moving towards market globalization. To do this, it is suggested that direct alliances with business and government sectors by means of internship programs are necessary. Excerpts from a literature review show business schools across the country leading the way in introducing internship-type approaches to learning and becoming more globalized in their curriculum as a result. However, large-scale encouragement for campus-wide internship programs is not evident, possibly due to a lack of a direct alliance between the academy and the professions, the lack of faculty promoters, and unfavorable attitudes of the academic and business communities. To establish an internship concept on a larger scale requires a well managed program; incentives to faculty to pursue internship development; the creation of committees within the university to develop professional ties, curricula, and set guidelines for internships; and changing attitudes within the business community by showing how business can benefit from such internship programs. (GLR)

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Developing International Student Internships

PAPER GIVEN AT THE EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION FOR WORLD BUSINESS AND THE PROFESSIONS ELEVENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

HE025624

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Developing International Student Internships

Paper Given at the Eastern Michigan University Languages and Communication For World Business and the Professions Eleventh Annual Conference

Every day, the newspapers tell us the same thing: the current global recession is causing economic hardship, unemployment, uncertainty, and despair. Nowhere have the effects of recession been more keenly felt than in states like Michigan, which once comprised the industrial engine of America. In previous years, during presidential primaries these states might have been referred to as our nation's economic muscle--now the media continually describe us merely as the Rust Belt, as our industrial superstructure ages--perhaps to the point of obsolescence --and as decreasing market shares make lay-offs in the manufacturing sector common-place headlines.

Education, it seems, is always on the "cutting edge" of recession. During my twenty-plus years in academe, I cannot ever remember hearing of an overabundance of resources being delegated to colleges and universities. During the boom times, academe manages to get by, sucking in its collective breath. During the tough times, we scramble to cut our loses, always teetering on the rim of some real or imagined impending economic collapse.

Traditionally, the business and academic worlds often swing in distinctly different orbits. At times, we may exist in different solar systems altogether--if not in entirely different galaxies. In my home town of Kalamazoo, for example, one would never suspect that The Upjohn Company--a giant in the pharmaceutical industry--and Western Michigan University--one of the twenty-largest universities in the country--have the same communal roots. Occasionally, the two institutions come together but

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usually in only a haphazard way, despite the good intentions of both parties to support each other's interests. This happens when two people live in the same household: they are bound occasionally to bump in to each other. However, in the case of Upjohn and WMU, there is no systematic attempt to exchange expertise via research or teaching. I suspect the same is true of most universities and business communities that surround them.

Some of the people most directly affected by the current recession are students--especially students at large, state universities like WMU who cannot fall back on the resources of privilege to make their ways in the world. The marketability of such students in a competitive job market rests with their ability to provide practical and professional skills to potential employers, to be able to merge into the professional environment with the least amount of training--or, often, re-training--necessary to become productive parts of the increasingly competitive economic machine. Given the globalization of the marketplace, students emerging from the academy today cannot graduate with impractical or outmoded skills. They need, first, to graduate with a reasonable and practical degree of expertise in their chosen profession, which, unfortunately, is not always the case; second, they need to graduate with the skills necessary to adapt to a quickly changing world and, thus, ensure a degree of competitiveness as professional circumstances dictate; third, they need to leave the campus with a sense of internationality, realizing that America is not the center of world commerce that once it might have been and that in order to compete in an international economy they must know how to communicate in the world's languages, not merely in their own. One of the basic ways that colleges and universities can improve the quality of education on their campuses and to prepare their students in

meaningful ways to enter the world after graduation is to develop direct alliances with the business and government sectors by means of internship programs. Certainly, internships and cooperative education are not new terms in the academic lexicon, but, for the most part, they are terms relegated to the educational appendices--rather than being an integral part of the text. We need, I think, to do much more in bringing the professional experience of the work place to the campus and in sending the academic world abroad to take root in the usually rocky soils of the real world.

If in the current economic recession academe is twice recessed, then the liberal arts are three times recessed--rather the liberal arts graduate seems always to live in the Great Depression. During the last twenty years, liberal arts degrees have been among the least marketable certificates awarded, and liberal arts graduates traditionally command the lowest salaries--apparently because their degrees are deemed impractical. I mention this point not as part of a plea to hire more liberal arts students from the bargain basements of Arts and Sciences curricula, but by way of background for why I, as an English professor, have become involved in the development of student internships. As a specialist in professional writing (public relations, technical, and business communications) and as an external consultant to business and government, I have for years tried to keep a keen eye out for internship opportunities for my students as a means to make them more marketable. My students, therefore, have worked for such diverse clientele as health organizations, government agencies, publishers, public relations firms, and assorted businesses. For the most part, the university has stood indifferent to this endeavor. As long as it has not detracted from my teaching and publishing, I am free to invest my time identifying prospective internship opportunities, informing and selecting students, and serving as a university contact person. Certainly,

the emphasis in my department is not on applied experience, and like most departments of English, we make no integral, coordinated effort to make internships a part of our program. Typically, a few of us on the staff will sponsor internships, but certainly not in a methodical way. I usually sponsor one or two each semester as the opportunities and students avail themselves.

Two summers ago, for example, while wearing my Chair of Canadian Studies hat, I found myself at a government dinner in Toronto sitting with Tony Schifano, director of the Michigan Trade Office there and whom I, of course, approached about the possibility of placing student interns in his office. After he responded favorably, I returned to Kalamazoo to spend a good deal of time juggling logistics: interviewing students, developing a specific contract with Tony and arranging academic credit for the student, finding lodging for the student at the University of Toronto, handling insurance and transportation matters, and arranging a generous fellowship through the Haworth Company, of Holland, MI. Thus, we were able to send a bright, highly motivated, first-generation college journalism-marketing student to Toronto to work for the State of Michigan Commerce Department. In his report to me following the internship, Richard--the student--reported to me that his experience working for Tony in Canada had been one of the highlights of his college career. He had been able to gain insight into the real world of business, politics, and networking lying at the heart of any career and yet which are usually not accessible in the campus environment. Despite all of the inevitable logistical problems, the internship did what it was supposed to do: help Richard get a toe-hold in the career world and supply some inexpensive labor for an overworked, deserving government agency. Everybody benefitted from the experience.

If you review the current professional literature dealing with internships, you will be hard-pressed to find anything negative reported about them. Consistently, the academics, business people, and other investigators of the role of internships in higher education report on very significant, meaningful results effected by such cooperative ventures. While all curricula on campus are alluded to in this literature, it is the business colleges that are leading the way. As Carole K. Barnett writes in "The Michigan Global Agenda: Research and Teaching in the 1990s," published by *Human Resource Management*,

> In June 1990, the Michigan Business School of the University of Michigan held an industry-academic symposium to illuminate the dynamic issues that have emerged from the decade-long shift to the global economy and to stimulate dialogue regarding the business-business-school relationship. It was recognized from the outset that new approaches to learning will demand multiframe thinking and powerful innovations in current teaching methods. The key characteristics of a globalized business school include: 1. cultural exposure via international internships and student exchanges, 2. language programs for students and faculty, 3. comparative courses in all disciplines, 4. new visiting faculty recruited from foreign countries and the US for collaborative research and teaching, 5. the establishment of new exchanges between US and foreign universities as well as with global corporations, 6. problem-centered courses taught by faculty from multiple disciplines forming partnerships in teaching, and 7. courses focusing on particular applications instead of generic skills for global leadership development.[1]

Certainly, this kind of emphasis on applied learning, flexibility, and on re-thinking the way in which faculty and students interact, along with integrating the professional experience into the academic curriculum, is not just an issue relevant just to business

[1]Carole K. Barnett, "The Michigan Global Agenda: Research and Teaching in the 1990s," *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 5-26.

schools. Yet, while the literature of various professions reports a similar growing concern for the applicability of their students' education, focusing directly on internship programs as an important tool, it is the business college where we find the most developed model. As Patricia J. Carlson and James Wetherbe report,

> Many senior-level information systems (IS) executives feel that traditional IS master of business administration (MBA) curricula do not adequately train graduates to be truly effective upon entering the job market. The graduates are often ill-prepared to take on the nontechnical responsibilities of their new positions. IS MBA graduates should be able to apply information technology to business problems, develop a positive relationship with the different functional areas of the organization, and build and work in teams. To do this, they need IS organizing skills, business knowledge, and human relations skills. The traditional classroom curriculum is only one aspect of a well-rounded education. Equally important are techniques that expose students to "real world" situations. These include: 1. role playing, 2. case studies, and 3. internships and cooperative programs.[2]

Or as Philip A. Perry points out in *Marketing News*,

> The quality of marketing education is an issue because it is the foundation for new talent that will keep companies growing. The shifting structures of US business have had an effect on what companies expect from marketing education, whether they find it, and how they recruit. Some high-technology and financial companies would like marketing education to better reflect their business needs. According to Bruce Mowery, director of marketing communications for Apple Computer Inc., a lot of business school cases tend to be based on historical models of companies and ways to get things done that will no longer apply in the 1990s. He would like to see more emphasis on nonhierarchical organizations, on how to handle change, and on such subjects as alternate management styles. Several marketing professionals

[2] Patricia J. Carlson and James Wetherbe, "Revamping the IS MBA," *CIO*, Vol. 3 No. 1 (Oct. 1989): 68, 70.

> remarked on the importance of internships, emphasizing that they give recruits a realistic perspective. For some companies, . . .education is not enough; they demand experience beyond the . . .degree.[3]

As Robert Denhardt suggests in *Public Administration Quarterly*,

> In public administration, the approach to management education in the past has emphasized knowledge to the exclusion of action. Managers constantly face important ethical questions, and if they are taught only facts, they cannot be expected to make informed choices about questions of value. Schools are not giving enough attention to such topics as creativity, problem-solving, and social responsibility. Given this situation, there are several issues faced by faculty and administrators today, some of which include: 1. An improved understanding of the relation between knowledge and action is needed. 2. It is necessary to detail the changes in organizations and society that are likely to influence the direction of management and education. 3. The curriculum clearly must reaffirm the importance of work in organizational behavior and the importance of activities outside of the regular classroom. 4. Students should have opportunities to understand the choices they will face as managers, including valuational choices.[4]

And as Michael A. Verespej writes in *Industry Week*,

> US industry is doing a poor job of attracting business school graduates into the operations end of manufacturing. . . . Recently, however, closer ties between businesses and universities have started to bring about some changes. Universities are beginning to tailor their programs more toward the practical, problem-solving side and away from the dry theoretical approach. [Manufacturers] can compete by stressing early

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[3] Philip A. Perry , "Firms Want More from Marketing Schools," *Marketing News*, Vol. 23, No. 15 (July 17 , 1989): 1-2.

[4] Robert Denhardt, "The Contemporary Critique of Management Education: Lessons for Business and Public Administration," *Public Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Summer 1987): 123-33.

> management opportunities and by providing internships and sponsoring co-op programs.[5]

These comments are typical of the thinking now going on in business schools across the country, and this current emphasis is not solely on business education. A review of the literature shows similar criticism of educational curricula and the need for applied experiences in such areas as teaching, psychology, educational administration, social work, publishing, psychology, theater, occupational therapy, and in professions too numerous to mention here.

Thus, while the rationale certainly exists for programs campus wide to incorporate applied study into their curricula, the questions arise, "Why don't more departments and colleges do so in a methodical way? Why in the face of such evidence do we persist in substandard means of instruction?"

First, college curriculum committees move notoriously slowly and are steeped in politics and turf-protecting. Even the most innovative and future-minded faculty are going to see proposals to revamp curriculum bog down in the bureaucratic process of changing curriculum requirements. As the current issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* points out,

> Some professors . . . are deeply skeptical [about changes in academic ethos to place greater emphasis on teaching]. They question whether [such universities as] Syracuse University [now attempting such a metamorphosis] can change in a few years an academic ethos that began more than a century ago.[6]

Nowhere in the literature do I find any indication that departments and colleges are moving in any large-scale or orderly way to encourage the specific development of

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[5]Michael Verespej, "Who Wants a Career in Manufacturing?" *Industry Week*. Vol. 233, No. 4 (May 18, 1987): 78-84.

[6] "Syracuse Wants to Change Academic Ethos to Place Greater Emphasis on Teaching," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 38, No. 29 (March 25, 1992): A14.

internship programs. Today, most internships are the product of individual entrepreneurial faculty members and not the result of curriculum committees.

Second, the development of internships requires a faculty promoter, and this requires faculty to have the time and the reward mechanism to encourage their efforts. Despite warnings about the state of higher education in America such as the 1990 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching report, "Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities at the Professorate," colleges and universities persist in holding on to the traditional standards for promotion and tenure. At least in my field of the liberal arts, faculty still obey the law of publish or perish, which is our academic deity. Faculty are rewarded primarily for publishing theoretical--at times, esoteric--studies of research. Work in applied fields is deemed to be service work. Thus, internship programs are more the result of charity on the part of the professor than a regular academic task. No untenured assistant professor in his or her right mind is going to stake an academic career on the development of meaningful teaching and program development in lieu of the publication of theoretical--i.e., "scholarly"--research, no matter how arcane that research ultimately may prove to be.

Third, successful internships require a direct alliance between the academy and the professions. While the current political and economic environment encourages many relationships, people on both sides of the fence have their doubts about how far they should become involved in the other's domain. "Universities are not the handmaidens of industry," I hear my colleagues say. "Our role is to educate the mind and not to be a placement center or training facility for the business world." Conversely, the people I work with in business and industry often envision an internship program to be too much of a bother--too much of a potential interruption in

internship program to be too much of a bother--too much of a potential interruption in their already busy lives. They see it as more of a "baby-sitting" task than as a means to a supply of inexpensive, supplemental labor and a valuable recruiting and screening tool.

So what is needed if universities are to take the advice of so much of the professional literature currently being written concerning the need for internships? In the first place, to be effective, internship programs need to be well managed. As summarized by Patsy Lee, writing in the *CPA Journal*,

> The internship's success relies on the implementation steps, most of which are taken before the internship. These include . . . defining the objectives of the internship, . . . designating a primary contact person (PCP) within the office of the sponsoring firm, . . .establishing the frequency and timing of written evaluations, . . . [and so forth][7]

To set up such a regimen, we need, first, to recognize the necessity of such programs by offering incentives to faculty to pursue internship development. This means making released time available and changing tenure and promotion criteria. Universities also need to take a systematic approach by establishing department, college, and university committees charged with pursuing the necessary professional ties, developing curriculum, and setting guidelines for internships. Business, too, needs to become more aware of the advantages that internships offer. As much of the literature indicates, a well-run internship program rewards business with practical results and competitive advantages: a labor pool of educated pre-professionals who are motivated, energetic, and flexible; an effective means to integrate new employees into the

[7] Patsy L. Lee, "Faculty Internships in Public Accounting: Planning Is the Most Important Step in Implementation," CPA Journal, Vol. 58, No. 9 (Sept. 1988): 84-86.

corporate or professional environment; a way to screen prospective job candidates via on-the-job evaluations; and a means to affect college curricula and influence the education system to meet more clearly the training needs of the professional world.

Through my involvement in the Office of International Affairs at Western Michigan University, I have lobbied for internships and international field experience for WMU students regardless of the student's curriculum. Of course, as Chair of Canadian Studies, most of my focus is on America's northern neighbor. However, I think that every qualified student has much to gain from working as an intern outside of the United States. How much more marketable is a potential technical writer or public relations major if she or he has spent time working with a U.S. company in Japan--having learned something of the language and culture of the Japanese? How much more knowledgeable is a potential health-care specialist after having spent time as an intern in Canada experiencing first-hand the Canadian health-care system about which we in the U.S. are hearing so much these days? How much more experienced is a potential teacher having worked as an intern in a German school? The answer is obvious: such training not only intrinsically benefits the student, but also provides needed expertise to his/her potential employers.

I would like to see more businesses and universities follow the lead of such companies as Monsanto and Fujitsu and such universities as Northeastern and Kent State in their methodical attention to internships and co-operative learning. We need, too, to follow the lead of Syracuse University in re-examining the role of teaching on campus and its position compared with faculty research pursuits. Given the emerging world economy and the critical problems faced by students and businesses alike because of changing international circumstances and financial realities, the time has come, I

think, for higher education to do something "radical": focus education on applied skills, practical values, and on involving all sectors of our culture--especially the business sector--in the educational process across the curriculum.

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